

THE DEALER, ROCKN' INTRO

(from THE MANUSCRIPT)

by Michael Stephen Fuchs

"When you're dead, you're all dead."

- J. B. Watson

Elsewhere in that same singular city, a man was being serenaded inside of a helmet. The man, who was called FreeBSD, had rigged up the stereophonic helmet because no one manufactured one. It didn't much mitigate the fantastic danger already inherent in riding a motorcycle to have raucous music pounding straight into the ears of the rider; so headphones in motorcycle helmets were an unavailable option. It had been a fairly modest engineering problem to solve on his own, though. And so here he was zipping back to the city on the Long Island Expressway, deep in the aural bliss of the Golden Renaissance of Modern Rock.

FreeBSD – along with millions of his late-Generation-X brethren – had managed to endure many years (most of them in the mid-eighties) during which commercial radio had been a vast wasteland of bubblegum pop, dinosaur classic rock, and shitkicking country/western. This was not fertile musical soil in which to nurture the seeds of young creative lives. However, miraculously, at the other end of that dark tunnel of echoing musical banality there appeared a warm golden glow: the Modern Rock Revolution.

Sometime in the early to mid 90s, "alternative" got rechristened as "modern rock." And, whereas alternative had been something you could only hear on college radio stations, and only for the few minutes you were physically within about seventy-five

yards of the student union as you drove by, modern rock actually got played on stations that made money and had more than 1000 watts behind their transmitters. Things had gotten so good, so quickly, in fact, that by late 1995 some cities actually had *two* modern rock stations; and on top of that, the classic rock stations were playing a decent current chart now and then just to fit in.

Like all renaissances, this one had its peak, and it fell in loose few-month folds around the end of 1995 and the beginning of 1996. For a brief shining moment it was almost impossible to turn on the radio without hearing something innovative, well-written, compelling, and loud: Beck's "Loser," Bush's "Come Down" and "Machine Head," The Offspring's "No Self Esteem" and "Come Out and Play," Garbage's "The Queerest of the Queer," White Zombie's "More Human Than Human" and "Electric Head, Pt. 2," that sexy little "Do You Sleep" number by Lisa Loeb. There was more good stuff, much more: numerous charts by the uber-band Live, "Zero" by The Smashing Pumpkins, Filter's "Nice Shot, Man", "Closer" (slightly censored), by Nine Inch Nails; "Love Spreads" by The Stone Roses, "Ants Marching" by Dave Mathews, and No Doubt's "Just A Girl." "Walk on the Water" by Toad the Wet Sprocket; "Trigger Happy Jack" by Poe. "Walk This World" by Heather Nova.

In short, the airwaves rocked. Yeah, sure, there was something vaguely formulaic and suspicious about this lineup. But, in the final analysis, these songs just absolutely gave you what you wanted and, in the end, any dubiousness you felt about their provenance or profundity was probably due to it all being so strangely good. And being played on the radio.

FreeBSD had stopped listening to his expansive and eclectic CD collection entirely, for almost six straight months. The radio was better. Who could have predicted it?

These were all matters of opinion, of course. But FreeBSD didn't care for anyone else's.

In a past life – prior to his reincarnation as a high-volume New York City narcotics dealer – FreeBSD held the job title of "Lead Systems Administrator." As such, he had been responsible for riding herd on twenty or so Unix servers and a 200-device local area network. Anyone who has ever administrated systems will attest that this is demanding and very unsexy work. But he happened to do it in a sexy place, namely the fabled New Media Lab at MIT. Moreover, no one looked at his purchase requisitions too closely.

That's why on FreeBSD's very last night of work at the Lab, he spent some quality time with his new CD burner and made himself a two-disc set that memorialized and immortalized that Golden Era he so relished. The apotheosis of the musical moment was complete. And now he could, and did, take 95/96 with him wherever he went. Even on the bike.

The bike, an '81 Yamaha Maxim 650, had been with him since undergrad, through three different cities. Though a little long in the tooth, it had low mileage and ran well – and still accelerated way too fast for anyone's good.

The disc player he'd bolted onto the side of the frame, inside of and through the right saddle bag. When he hopped on, he would fish a stereo cord with male jacks on both

ends out of the bag, plug one end into the player, and the other into the hacked jack on the side of his helmet.

Listening to this type of music at high volume inside a motorcycle helmet was a symbolic, as well as a pleasurable, act. These songs imparted substantial energy – and a certain blissful state of, not to put too fine a point on it, *not giving a fuck*. By no means could one embody not giving a fuck quite so forcefully as by willfully failing to hear car horns, police sirens, and indeed noise of any sort on the road while on a motorcycle – a mode of transportation that was, even under ideal conditions, one of the most direct routes to death and dismemberment still common in our society since coal mining, stage coach robbery, and frontier homesteading all went out of style.

Recently, when the money started rolling in, he'd thought about picking up a Ducati, or a BMW, or some other insanely fast machine. But the old one still thrilled him, and fifteen grand or so stayed in his retirement fund this way. FreeBSD was intensely interested in retirement. In his new line, it was axiomatic that an early retirement was one you were more likely to live to see.